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PARIS AND LONDON FOR AFRICAWATCHERS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: FRENCH AMBASSADOR ON WORLD BANK AND DEBY  
PROSPECTS

Classified By: DCM LUCY TAMLYN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (C)

[11](#). (C) Summary: In a wide-ranging tour d'horizon, the French Ambassador in Chad defended President Deby as the only option for Chad, and affirmed that France would defend Chad's territorial integrity. France, according to Ambassador Bercot, is working to prevent Chad from becoming a failed state, and its efforts should be better appreciated. Bercot welcomed what he interpreted to be Washington's recognition of the importance of keeping Chad stable, particularly in view of the potential impact of instability on the Darfur conflict. Dismissing arguments that the United States and France should work together to support a peaceful transition, Bercot stated that there was no system in Chad to support: there was only Deby. End summary.

[12](#). (U) French Ambassador to Chad Jean-Pierre Bercot hosted Ambassador Wall and DCM Tamlyn to lunch on January 24 for a wide-ranging discussion of Chad's current impasse with the World Bank and prospects for the Deby regime. French DCM Francois Barateau also attended.

World Bank and Chad - a problem of communication  
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[13](#). (SBU) Ambassador Bercot explained that the current impasse with the World Bank was for the most part the result of poor communication. President Deby, he said, had been ready to postpone promulgation of the revised oil revenue management law until he was informed that the World Bank had requested Citibank to freeze Chad's escrow account. Even before the law was passed, Bercot believed that agreement could have been reached if the World Bank had only communicated with Deby at

an appropriately high level (i.e. at the President or deputy level). Having lower level technocrats deliver the message had been counterproductive. President Deby, according to Bercot, would have been amenable to consideration of a short moratorium on the law -- possibly just until the elections -- so as to provide some resources during this critical time. Bercot also underscored what he considered to be extreme maladroitness on the part of the oil consortium for not arranging a meeting between Deby and the ExxonMobil CEO when Deby desired such an encounter. According to Ambassador Bercot, President Deby feels that Chad is getting a pittance compared to what the oil consortium is making -- and even compared to what neighbor Cameroon is reaping. Bercot emphasized that he was not defending Deby -- he was simply presenting the case from the Chadian perspective. Deby, to Bercot's mind, was a soldier. He was not an economist, and

he didn't have a very deep understanding of the issues. He had approached negotiations with the World Bank as a soldier, had used war-time tactics, and had failed to achieve his objective. However, it looked as if things were getting back on course. Bercot referred to the letter dated January 20 from the President of the World Bank to President Deby, in which Wolfowitz expressed understanding of Deby's situation, and a desire to continue talking. Bercot felt that the two would need to meet to resolve the issue, but seemed inclined to believe that resolution was eminently possible.

#### France and Chad's conflicts

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14. (C) On the subject of Chad's current security situation, Bercot acknowledged that Deby needed money for weapons and aircraft. He said that Deby had asked the Government of France to sell him weapons, and France had unequivocally refused -- and had further cautioned him under no circumstances to use French nationals to procure weapons in third countries. As a result, as was well known, Deby was seeking weapons in Georgia, Khazakstan and Israel. Ambassador Bercot said that France had agreed to continue to provide logistics support -- which meant that French planes were daily transporting these newly-acquired items, including guns and ammunition, to the East. But, stressed Bercot, we will not sell him one bullet. Ambassador Wall asked if France would assist Chad if the country was attacked. Ambassador Bercot responded that France was ready to defend Chad's territorial integrity. Asked if that included supporting the President in the event of an armed assault in the capital, Ambassador Bercot said that that decision would be taken at the time. He reminded Ambassador Wall that he foresaw only three scenarios: Deby died in office, Deby was ousted and killed or Deby vanquished his opponents. Deby

would not leave alive, he assured Ambassador Wall.

#### Where Chad is heading... .

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15. (C) Turning to France's larger role in Chad, Ambassador Bercot explained that France really had no interests any more in Chad. They had had a reason to have their armed forces here at one time, but now it was simply a convenient place to train. Rather, France was in Chad in order to protect some 1,000 French citizens and to prevent instability in the country and in the region. In a tone of aggrievement, Bercot complained that France was assuming this burden all alone -- not only was it not getting any assistance in this effort from any western country, but to boot it was also accused of propping up Deby's regime. This was not the case, they are only seeking to "freeze the situation" and to keep it from deteriorating into chaos and turning into another failed or rogue state. In response to Ambassador Wall's arguments that the way forward to avoid a crisis was to work for a peaceful transition, Ambassador Bercot argued that no one could replace Deby. It was true he was sick -- he might have ten years under normal circumstances -- but it was doubtful that he could "biologically or physically" outlast his next mandate. At the same time, there were no candidates on the political landscape that could hold the country together. After the example of Habre and Deby, opined Bercot, any leader will be a prisoner of his clan and all one could expect was extreme rapaciousness. As an example, according to Bercot, opposition politician Ngarlejy Youroungar had recently visited China and told the Chinese that they "could have the country on a platter" and build a pipeline from the oil region north through Port Sudan if they would support him. Nonetheless, Bercot speculated that it was really time for a southerner to take over -- ideally a southern muslim.

16. (C) Ambassador Wall responded that we should be supporting a process that can be accepted as credible and legitimate -- not an individual -- and pointed out that there were in fact many candidates who could emerge from such a process with stature to serve their country. Ambassador Wall explained that protecting President Deby from the

backlash against his efforts to stay in power would not spare Chad or its international partners from having to deal with the tensions now mounting in the country. The longer the current impasse continued, the more dangerous the situation would become. He appealed to the French Ambassador to work together in promoting a process of peaceful change. Ambassador Bercot commented that in Chad there was not even a system - or a process - to support. He stated that if Deby was overthrown, his clansmen would be killed or would flee. As for the rest of the government, they would be rehired under the next administration (as they had been rehired by Deby from the Habre administration).

17. (SBU) Brandishing reporting cables from his Embassy in Washington, Bercot briefed the Ambassador on the latest meetings between AF Bureau officials and French officials. He also read portions of an evidently much-perused copy of the Secretary's statement on "transformational diplomacy." He appeared to be taken with the notion, and welcomed Washington's recognition of the need for such an approach. He noted that the Secretary may not have had Chad in mind when she mentioned the importance of better diplomatic and military coordination, but it was certainly appropriate. However, he bemoaned the fact that the U.S. Embassy had so few resources and assets in Chad. He said that in French meetings with Washington officials, they had asked Washington to give the U.S. Embassy in Chad the means necessary to make a difference. Bercot expressed sympathy that the United States didn't command the resources and contacts that he had, such as French advisors in every Chadian government ministry, who are able to give him the pulse and temperature daily of what was happening in the Chadian government (a high-ranking Chadian presidential confidant called Ambassador Bercot at this point to ask a favor, conveniently illustrating Bercot's point).

18. (C) Concerning exchanges between French officials and State Department officials, Bercot reported that he understood that there may be differences in Washington on how tough to be on Chad over changes to the oil revenue management law. Ambassador Bercot welcomed what he interpreted to be dawning recognition by State Department

policy makers of the importance of keeping Chad stable -- particularly in view of the negative impact that instability would have on the Darfur situation. Ambassador Bercot closed by saying that he had been instructed to work more closely with his American counterpart in Chad, and therefore proposed meeting at least once a month for discussion. He also offered to partner with the United States on development projects if there was interest.

Comment

19. (C) It appears that Ambassador Bercot only hears that part of the message that he agrees with. In this instance, he welcomes Washington's recognition of the importance of Chad for the region's stability (a la France), but resolutely chooses not to hear the message that Chad's international partners should be working to prevent the crash landing that so many -- including France -- predict for the Deby regime.  
WALL